

Parent Guide

to the

February 2003



2002 Similar Schools Ranks based on the Academic Performance Index

In February 2003, public schools in California received their fourth Academic Performance Index (API) Base reports. The API is the cornerstone of the Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999. It measures the academic performance and progress of schools. Annual growth targets for future academic improvement are determined for schools based on the API. Schools that reach their annual targets may be rewarded. Schools that do not meet their targets may be eligible for interventions or subject to sanctions.

2002 API Base Reports

The API Base for the 2002–2003 API Reporting Cycle was based on results of the Stanford 9 achievement test and the California Standards Test in English-Language Arts, in Mathematics, and in Social Science (grades 10–11) given in spring 2002 as part of the state's Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. The 2002 API Base also includes the results of the 2002 California High School Exit Examination for grade 10. The number of grade 9 students passing the CAHSEE in 2001 will be estimated and also included in the 2002 API Base. The 2002 API Base report for a school shows:

- 2002 API Base score
- 2002 statewide rank
- 2002 rank compared to 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics (similar schools rank)
- 2002–2003 API growth target for the school and for numerically significant groups of students in the school
- 2003 API target (2002 API Base plus growth target)
- School demographic characteristics

Small schools, defined as having between 11 and 99 valid STAR scores, do not receive similar schools ranks. The API score is on a scale of 200–1000. The statewide and similar schools ranks are on a scale of 1–10. The API reports and detailed information about the API can be found at <http://api.cde.ca.gov> on the California Department of Education (CDE) web site.

Similar Schools Ranks

The API reports include a “similar schools rank.” This information shows where a school ranks on a scale of 1–10, compared with 100 other schools with similar demographic characteristics. California public schools serve students with many different backgrounds and needs. As a result, schools face different educational challenges. The similar schools ranks for 2002 allow schools to look at their academic performance compared to other schools with some of the same opportunities and challenges. The comparison of similar schools is required by the PSAA and provides additional information about schools beyond that provided by APIs and statewide ranks. Similar schools ranks are not used to establish eligibility for awards or interventions provided by the PSAA.

Several school demographic characteristics form the basis for determining the similar schools comparisons. Page 2 of this guide provides a complete listing of the demographic characteristics used.

Looking Ahead — The 2002–2003 API Growth Report

In the fall of 2003, schools will receive their 2002–2003 API Growth reports. These reports will include the following information for each school:

- 2002–2003 school growth (2002 API Growth score minus 2002 API Base score)
- 2002–2003 growth for numerically significant groups of students in the school
- Whether growth targets were met
- Whether the school is awards eligible

Questions and Answers about the Similar Schools Ranks in the 2002 API Report

What is the PSAA?

The PSAA is designed to measure the academic improvement of California public schools, reward those schools that meet their improvement goals, and help those schools that do not meet their goals. A key part of the PSAA is the Academic Performance Index (API) report. Schools received their 2002 API Base reports in February 2003.

What is the API?

The API measures the performance and progress of a school. It is a numeric index or scale that ranges from a low of 200 to a high of 1000. The state has set 800 as the API score that schools should strive to meet. Schools that fall short of 800 will be required to meet annual growth targets until the statewide target of 800 is reached. Schools that already meet or exceed the statewide target of 800 should continue working to improve the academic performance of all their students.

What are the new indicators for the 2002 API Base?

New indicators used in the calculations for the 2002 API Base include:

- Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program:
 - California Standards Test in Mathematics (CST Math)
 - California Standards Test in Social Science (CST SS)—grades 10 through 11
- California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE)—grades 9 and 10 (in 2003, grades 10 and 11; in 2004, grades 10, 11, and 12)

Results of the Stanford 9 and the California Standards Test in English-Language Arts (CST ELA) were used in calculating the API in the previous API reporting cycle.

What are the similar schools ranks?

The Public Schools Accountability Act (PSAA) of 1999 [Education Code Section 52056(a)] requires the state to annually rank all public schools in California based on the API. The similar schools rank compares a school's academic achievement on the API with other schools that have similar demographic characteristics.

Demographic Characteristics Used to Identify Similar Schools

The PSAA law requires that the following school demographic characteristics, or factors, be used to identify the similar schools:

School Demographic Characteristics	How Characteristics Are Determined
Pupil mobility	% of students who first attended the school in the current year
Pupil ethnicity	% of students in the school in each of these ethnic categories: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • African American (not of Hispanic origin) • American Indian or Alaska Native • Asian • Filipino • Hispanic or Latino • Pacific Islander • White (not of Hispanic origin)
Pupil socioeconomic status	Average of all parent educational level responses for the school % of students in the school who participated in the free or reduced price lunch program
Percentage of teachers who are fully credentialed	% of teachers in the school who are fully credentialed
Percentage of teachers who hold emergency credentials	% of teachers in the school who hold emergency permits
Percentage of pupils who are English language learners	% of students in the school who are classified as English language learners
Average class size per grade level	Average class size at the school for each grade level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • K-3 • 4-6 • Core academic courses in departmentalized programs
Whether the schools operate multi-track year-round educational programs	Schools are categorized as either operating or not operating multi-track year-round educational programs



What is the purpose of comparing similar schools in the API report?

California public schools serve groups of students with different backgrounds and needs. As a result, schools face different educational challenges and opportunities. For this reason, it is helpful to provide information about a school's academic achievement as it compares to similar schools.

How are the similar schools ranks used?

The similar schools ranks can be used in at least two ways. First, schools can use this information as a reference point for judging their academic achievement against other schools facing similar challenges. Second, schools may improve their academic performance by studying what similar schools with higher rankings are doing. Similar schools ranks are not used in any way as the basis for awards or sanctions.

What sources were used to collect the demographic data for the 2002 similar schools ranks?

The demographic data for the similar schools ranks came from several sources, including the 2002 administration of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program and the 2001 California Basic Educational Data System (CBEDS).

How were the 2002 similar schools ranks calculated?

Several steps were used to calculate the 2002 similar schools ranks. First, schools were divided into grade level categories (elementary, middle, and high schools). Then, a School Characteristics Index (SCI), or composite of the school's demographic characteristics, was calculated for each school. Next, a comparison group of 100 similar schools was formed, based on similar SCIs. Last, the similar schools rank for each school was generated. This ranking was based on the school's API Base compared with the APIs of other similar schools in the comparison group.

What is the SCI and how is it calculated?

The SCI combines the demographic characteristics of a school. It is calculated through a statistical procedure that produces a single index based on all of the factors included. Schools with SCIs that are close in numerical value face similar educational challenges and opportunities.

Do all 100 schools in the same similar schools rank have the same demographic characteristics?

Each school is unique; therefore, it is impossible to find similar schools that match in every way. In order to form large enough

groups of similar schools for meaningful ranks, the procedure used for each SCI allows for some differences between schools.

How were the similar schools ranks determined for 2002?

A comparison group for each school was formed by placing the school's SCI as the median or mid-point (middle) and taking the 50 schools with SCIs just above and the 50 just below. The 100 schools in the comparison group were sorted according to their 2002 API Base and divided into 10 equal-sized groups (deciles). The API of the school was then compared to the APIs of the schools in its group. The school was assigned a decile rank based on this comparison, and that is the rank shown on the report.

How can I find out which schools are in the comparison group for my student's school?

The list of the 100 schools included in each school's similar schools comparison group can be found in the Similar School Report accessed at <http://api.cde.ca.gov> on the CDE web site.

Another school in the district has similar students and almost exactly the same API score but a different "similar schools" rank. How can that be?

Even if schools appear quite similar, they may differ with respect to some measured characteristics. Small differences in two school's demographic characteristics and SCIs can result in very different groups of similar schools. If one school's comparison group has a different range of API scores than the other school, the two schools' ranks may differ.

Will the comparison group for my student's school remain the same from year to year?

No, because demographic characteristics change from year to year. In February 2003, your school received a 2002 similar schools rank which compared the school's 2002 API level to a group of 100 similar schools. In January or February 2004, your school will receive a 2003 similar schools rank which will compare its 2003 API level to a *new* group of 100 similar schools.

If our school's API score remains the same next year, will its statewide rank be the same as 2002?

Your rank will not necessarily be the same next year, even if your API score remains the same. Your rank may go up or down, depending on how the rest of the schools in the state perform. This is because your statewide rank is a comparison with other schools in the state.

How is a school's socioeconomic status measured?

Socioeconomic status is based on the school's average parent education level and percentage of student participation in the free or reduced price lunch program. The source for parent education level and free or reduced price lunch program is the demographics section of the STAR answer document.

Is a school penalized in any way if the parent educational level is not reported for all students?

Although there is no penalty for *not* providing parent educational levels, a school should do its best to obtain complete information so that its similar schools rank can be as accurate as possible. Reliable parent educational level information is helpful in producing the most appropriate similar schools group for your school.

How can elementary school children, as young as second graders, be expected to report their parents' educational level?

Parent educational level information is provided by the school and district. The method of collecting these data varies across the state, but schools and districts should ensure that the information is as accurate as possible. Young children are not expected to provide this information unassisted.

The similar schools rank for my student's school is higher (about the same, lower) than its statewide rank. How should that be interpreted?

These ranks are calculated in completely different ways. The statewide API rank compares your school to schools statewide. The similar schools rank compares your school to 100 schools like yours.

How can the similar schools rank for my student's school be raised?

The SCI, from which the group of similar schools is determined, is designed to reflect demographic characteristics *not* under a school's control. The school should focus on ways to raise its API by improving instruction and student achievement. These efforts should help improve the academic growth of the school, its API, and its school rankings.

Where can parents go for more information?

Parents should direct their questions about the API or the PSAA or plans for improving the school's academic performance to the principal or other school administrators. Schools also will be asking parents to become actively involved in the improvement process. Further information about the PSAA and API can be found at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/psaa> on the CDE web site.

Description of Similar Schools Ranks

The similar schools ranks compare an individual school's API to the 100 schools in its comparison group. Schools are ranked in ten equal groups (deciles) from the lowest (one) to the highest (ten). A description of the **similar schools ranks** follows:

Rank	Description
	This school's API is:
9 or 10	Well above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
7 or 8	Above average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
5 or 6	About average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
3 or 4	Below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics
1 or 2	Well below average for elementary, middle, or high schools with similar characteristics